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## THE SERPENT WITH A HUMAN HEAD IN ART AND IN MYSTERY PLAY

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ONE of the most noteworthy examples of the close relationship between religious drama and Christian art is to be found in the correspondence between pictured and dramatic representations of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. I call it noteworthy because in the field of art we shall find ourselves ultimately concerned with some of the great masters of the renaissance, and especially with one of the greatest works of one of the greatest masters—The Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel by Michelangelo.

Who has not noted with curiosity, in the picture of the temptation on that ceiling, the strange serpent almost wholly woman? Was this the result of some queer freak of misogyny on the part of the terrible Florentine? Or was there some old legend, now lost sight of, that might account for such a monster? Certain lines of Keats and Rossetti, perhaps, floated vaguely in the mind, and one dismissed the matter as probably having something to do with Lilith and Lamia.

It is my purpose, however, to show:—that the representation of the serpent in Eden as having a human head was common to drama and iconography; that it is first noticeable in the thirteenth, or the early part of the fourteenth century, being then a startling innovation in art; and that in all probability it was the mystery play which, to facilitate the dialogue between Eve and the serpent, first adopted it, from a literary source.

Let me first state in simple terms the problem a consideration of which has brought me to this point of view. The human-headed serpent, it would seem, must derive in one or other of the following ways:

- A. The literary source gives rise *independently* to the dramatic and iconographic representation;
- B. The literary source gives rise *first to the art form*, and that in turn brings about the dramatic;
- C. The literary source gives rise *first to the dramatic*, and that

in turn brings about the art form; or, as would seem only remotely probable,

D. The *dramatic form preceded* all, occasioning first the literary and then the art form.

That the art form might have preceded the other forms is a possibility that I have deemed hardly worthy of enumerating in this series of hypotheses. The artists before the thirteenth century so seldom originated anything, so persistently followed tradition or the direction of more learned men, that in the absence of any evidence that the serpent was represented with a human head before the thirteenth century, I am satisfied that we have in this case no original art source.

My first hypothesis, that the literary source might have given rise independently to the dramatic and art forms, is also proposed rather for the sake of completeness than with any serious expectation of its proving fruitful.

In the absence of immediately convincing evidence on this point, we must reason from probabilities. It does not seem likely that the thirteenth century artists,—who, as was observed of their predecessors, followed an ancient and fairly rigid tradition,—should in the case of the temptation and fall of man suddenly have been influenced to change their mode of representation purely by a literary source. There does not appear to be any sufficient reason for their doing so. In the efflorescence of art in the thirteenth century, which sought,—as Didron pointed out and Émile Mâle has further explained,—to give a complete mirror of human and divine affairs, it is true that many new iconographs appeared. But new and old were intended to teach doctrines, or to fix in the mind principles of knowledge and belief. Thus we have new episodes of the Bible story together with the ancient symbols, we have the Platonic as well as the Christian virtues, and personifications of all branches of knowledge. But the only explanation we have for the human head on the tempter is that this head, this woman's face, was assumed the better to ensnare Eve, since *similia similibus applaudunt*.<sup>1</sup> Neither this nor any other of the literary sources seems to have in it a germ of doctrine or belief such as to have caused one directing the work of artists to make them break their ancient tradition.

<sup>1</sup> Petrus Comestor, *Historia Libri Genesis*, in Migne, *Patrol. Lat.* CXCVIII, 1072.

What appeals to the artist far more powerfully than learned commentary, however, is the direct impression received by his sensitive and observant eye. If then he should see the serpent represented in a mystery play, he would be stimulated to represent it in his next picture to some extent as he saw it, especially if the play seemed to have the Church's approval.

The second hypothesis,—that the literary source gives rise first to the art, and that in turn brings about the dramatic form—is answered by the argument against the first.

These somewhat weak negative arguments lead naturally to the favorable consideration of the third hypothesis,—that the literary source gives rise first to the dramatic, and that in turn brings about the art form. But to establish this as the true line of derivation it will be necessary to present methodically the whole body of the evidence. The documents and iconographs, because it is impossible to assemble them into a complete and continuous chronological record, present many difficulties. Gaps of time and place, the possibility of lost plays and demolished pictures, must be allowed for.<sup>1</sup>

## I

### THE LITERARY SOURCES

Taking up the evidence as nearly as possible chronologically, I must begin with the literary sources.

Petrus Comestor in his comment on Genesis<sup>2</sup> (*Historia Libri Genesis*) says of the serpent in the garden of Eden, *tunc serpens erectus est ut homo*, and goes on to tell how Satan (*Lucifer*, he says), *Elegit etiam quoddam genus serpentis, ut ait Beda, virgineum vultum habens, quia similia similibus applaudunt*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> If at any time new evidence should come to light supporting the hypothesis that the art form was earlier than the dramatic, nothing would give me more pleasure. For such a relationship, inasmuch as it is far more unusual, is by so much the more interesting.

I treated the most striking example of the indebtedness of the mystery play to art, in my article on the Hegge play of the *Radix Jesse*, the Tree of Jesse, *Pub. of Mod. Lang. Assoc. of Amer.*, XXIX, 1914, pp. 327 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Migne *Patrol. Lat.* CXCVIII, 1072.

<sup>3</sup> I have not been able to find in Beda anything remotely suggesting the phrase which follows Comestor's *ut ait Beda*. Is it possible that the *ut ait Beda* refers solely to the clause *elegit quoddam genus serpentis*, which is entirely in agreement with Beda's explanation that the serpent was merely the instrument of Satan, not wise in itself?

I cannot refrain from attacking the text of Comestor, though it may appear

As Comestor died about 1173 A.D., his commentary may be regarded as nearly contemporaneous with the Anglo-Norman play of *Adam*. Inasmuch, therefore, as the play of *Adam*, which is the oldest extant vernacular French mystery play, does not present the serpent with a human head, and as there is no other Adam play in any language which does so present it in the twelfth century, we are obliged to regard Comestor as par excellence the literary source.<sup>1</sup>

After Peter Comestor, Vincent de Beauvais (ca. 1190—ca. 1264 A.D.) is the next source. In the *Speculum Naturale*, Lib. XX, Cap. XXXIII (Vol. I, Col. 1478 in the Douai edition of 1624), we read: *Draconcopedes serpentes magni sunt, et potentes, facies virgineas habentes humanis similes, in draconum corpus desinentes. Credibile est huius generis illum fuisse, per quem diabolus Euam decepit, quia (sicut dicit Beda) virgineum vultum habuit. Huic etiam diabolus se coniungens vel applicans ut consimili forma mulierem alliceret, faciem ei tantum ostendit, et reliquam partem corporis arborum frondibus occultavit.*

In the *Historia Destructionis Trojae* of Guido delle Colonne<sup>2</sup> (1287), Beda is (as in Comestor and Vincent) cited as authority for the human headed form of the tempter. In summarizing Guido's narrative, after speaking of the fall of the rebel angels, Gorra writes: "Questo diavolo fu Satana, o quel Leviatham, che primo cadde dal cielo e che gli Ebrei chiamano Beenoch, vale a

that my suggestion is a wild one. But as so far I have not been able to find the reference in Beda, I will venture the following hazardous guess. In one passage of the apocryphal Beda, the text reads: "*Serpens per se loqui non poterat . . . nisi nimirum illum diabolus utens, et velut organum per quod articulatum sonum emitteret*"—etc. (Migne, *Patrol. Lat.*, XCIII, 276).

Is it possible that Comestor having before him the above passage in an ancient and somewhat difficult manuscript partly obliterated by age, made the revolutionary blunder of reading the two words "*velut organum*" as "*vultum virgineum*"? In twelfth century writing similarity in the appearance of these two phrases is a possibility.

C. Hippeau in a note in his edition of *Le Bestiaire d'Amour*, p. 148, asks—"Bède le Vénérable ne dit-il pas que le serpent, pour parler à Ève, avait pris le visage d'une jeune fille?" His source, however, may be Comestor, or Vincent of Beauvais, rather than Beda himself.

<sup>1</sup> As to the supposed tradition linking Hebrew *Lillin* and classical *Lamia* with a monster half woman and half serpent, see page 290, note 2.

<sup>2</sup> E. Gorra, *Testi Inediti di Storia Troiana*; Introduzione,—Sulla *Leggenda Troiana* in Italia. Cap. II,—Guido delle Colonne, p. 135. The complete Latin text of Guido has not been accessible.

dire animo bruto, cioè serpente tortuoso, o anche drago (Isidore, *Orig.* VIII, ch. 11) del quale parla anche Davide. Di questo serpente che tentò sotto forma d'uomo i nostri primi padri, parla il Genesi 'secundum Mosaycam traditionem,' ma 'secundum traditionem sacrarum scripturarum catholice universalis ecclesie ratum est, ut scripsit Beda, quod diabolus elegit tunc quendam serpentem de quodam genere serpentum, virgineum habens vultum,' e questo noi dobbiamo credere aver tentato il primo uomo."

Next comes the anonymous and exceedingly popular *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*,<sup>1</sup> the date of which Paul Poppe fixes as about 1324.<sup>2</sup> This work has sometimes been erroneously attributed, in addition to his already enormous bulk of volumes, to Vincent de Beauvais. In the first chapter the author, after briefly mentioning the fall of Lucifer and the rebel angels from heaven, continues as follows:

- 11 *Quapropter diabolus, homini invidens, sibi insidiatur  
Et ad praecepti transgressionem ipsum inducere nitebatur:  
Quoddam ergo genus serpentis sibi diabolus eligebat.  
Qui tunc erectus gradiebatur et caput virgineum habebat:*
- 15 *In hunc fraudulosus deceptor mille artifex intrabat,  
Et per os eius loquens, verba deceptoris mulieri enarrabat.  
Tentavit autem mulierem tanquam minus providam,  
Reputans prudentem et cautum esse virum Adam.  
Accessit autem ad mulierem solam, sine viro existentem,*
- 20 *Quia solum facilius decepit diabolus, quam socios habentem.*

The same idea naturally appears in the fifteenth century translations of the *Speculum* into French, English and German.

<sup>1</sup> J. Lutz et P. Pérdrizet, *Speculum humanae salvationis. Texte critique: Traduction inédite de Jean Miélot* (1448), etc. Mulhouse 1907. 2 vols.

The Latin text is from a Munich MS. (Cm. 146) of the middle of the fourteenth century. This is one of the oldest MSS. of the *Speculum*, and contains 192 pen drawings, which are published, along with a number of other illustrations of the *Speculum* in volume II. See below, p. 267.

<sup>2</sup> "Wahrscheinlich um das Jahr 1324 von einem trotz aller Forschungen bis Heute unbekannt gebliebenen Verfasser in lateinischer Sprache verfasst, erlangte es schnell eine ungeheure Verbreitung." Paul Poppe, *Über das Speculum Humanae Salvationis*, Berlin, 1887.

Lutz and Pérdrizet, *op. cit.* I, p. 249, argue at some length that the *Speculum* was composed early in the fourteenth century at a Dominican convent in Strasburg by a Dominican of Saxon origin, whom they tentatively identify with a certain Ludolph of Saxony, a Dominican, who later became a Carthusian.

*Piers the Plowman* is the next source after the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*,—of course antedating the fifteenth century translations. In *Piers the Plowman* the serpent which tempted Eve is described as

y-lik a lusard, with a lady visage<sup>1</sup>

Having considered the foregoing literary sources for the origin of the human-headed serpent,—the earliest scarcely earlier than the first play of Adam and Eve, and the latest possibly a generation later than the first Adam play in which the serpent is given a human head,<sup>2</sup> I wish now to cite some of the important works

<sup>1</sup> Cf. W. W. Skeat, *Notes on Piers the Plowman*, Oxford, 1886, note on Bxviii. 355.

Is Chaucer, in the *Man of Lawes Tale*, possibly thinking of the same thing when he apostrophizes the wicked sultaness?

O sowdanesse, rote of iniquitee,  
Virago, thou Semyram the secunde,  
O serpent under femininitee,  
Lyk to the serpent depe in helle y-bounde,  
O feyned womman, al that may confounde  
Vertu and innocence, through thy malyce,  
Is bred in thee, as nest of every vyce!

—(*Man of Lawes Tale*, B. 360 ff.)

There is nothing more than a figure of speech in this comparison of the wicked woman with the serpent tempter; there is no direct suggestion that the serpent took the face of a woman in order to trick Eve. Yet Skeat does so interpret this passage, and thinks the line,

Thyn instrument so, weylawey the whyle!

in the following stanza has special significance:

O Satan envious sin thilke day  
That thou were chased from our heritage  
Wel knowestow to wommen the olde way!  
Thou madest Eva bringe us in servage.  
Thou wolt fordoon this cristen mariage.  
Thyn instrument so, weylawey the whyle!  
Makestow of wommen whan thou wolt begyle.

It seems to me that though possibly there may be an allusion here to the human-headed serpent of art, it is at best a rather shadowy one. Surely it is a common enough comment upon the story of the fall of man, and one characteristic of the middle ages, that Satan tempted Eve first because she was weaker than Adam, and that since Adam's fall was due to Eve, all men should beware of the falsely alluring beauty of women? The stanza just quoted I believe implies no more than this.

In the *Persones Tale* Chaucer tells the story of man's fall without even the vaguest allusion to anything like a human-headed serpent.

<sup>2</sup> That is, the Chester play, probably by Ranulf Higden, ca. 1328.

in which the temptation of man is recounted or alluded to without any hint that the serpent had a human head. This will serve to show how little probable it is that the artists were directly indebted to any literary source.

*Seventh to Eighth Century.*—From the apocryphal Beda,—since Beda is given as an authority for the human-headed tempter,—I quote a relevant passage:<sup>1</sup> *Serpens per se loqui non poterat, nec quia hoc a Creatore acceperat assumpsit, nisi nimirum illum diabolus utens, et velut organum per quod articulatum sonum emitteret: per illum nempe verba faciebat, et tamen hoc etiam ille nesciebat.*

In the several discussions attributed to Beda, both those classified by Migne as *dubia et spuria* and also the *exegetica genuina*, the same idea concerning the serpent is conveyed: that the devil used the serpent as his instrument or organ of utterance (*Patrol. Lat.* XCIII, 229 and XCI, 211). As I have already said, I find nothing in Beda to bear out Comestor's reference to the *virgineum vultum*.

*Eighth to Ninth Century (?)*—In Genesis B, the Anglo-Saxon poem formerly attributed to Caedmon (edited by Klaeber, Heidelberg, 1913), the tempter assumes the form of a serpent.

*Eleventh or Twelfth Century.*—Onulphus, *Poema Biblicum*.<sup>2</sup> The dialogue between Eve and the serpent is given without any description of the serpent's appearance.

*Twelfth Century, ca. 1100.*—Rupertus Abbas Tuitiensis (Migne, *Patrol. Lat.* CLXVII, 290) speaks of "*Sathanas, ipse draco magnus et serpens antiquus est.*"

*Thirteenth Century.*—St. Martinus Legionensis (Migne, *Patrol. Lat.* CCVIII) quotes St. Augustine, and it will be observed says just about the same thing that the venerable Beda said. This, then, seems to be the ancient and firmly established exegesis.

The author of the *Ancren Riwe* (Camden Society, London, 1853) in speaking of the temptation of Eve, gives no description of the serpent.

In another passage he describes the scorpion in the manner of the *Bestiary*:

ƿe scoriun is ones cunnes wurm ƿet haueð neb, ase me seið,  
sumdel iliche ase wummon 7 is neddre bihinden, makeð feir

<sup>1</sup> Beda Venerabilis, *Dubia et spuria* in Migne, *Patrol. Lat.* XCIII, 276.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Young, 'The Poema Biblicum of Onulphus,' *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, Vol. XXX, 1915, pp. 1 ff.



semblaunt, 7 fikeð mid te heaued, 7 stingeð mid te teile.  
 ȝet is lecherie: ȝet is ȝes deofles best, ȝet he let to chepinge 7 to  
 euerich gaderinge, 7 cheapeð hit forto sullen, 7 beswikeð monie  
 ȝuruh ȝet heo ne biholdeð nout bute ȝet feire heaued.

This passage may have some bearing, as Skeat suggests, upon the human-headed serpent, but the author of *Ancren Riwe* does not make any connection between the scorpion and the tempter of Eve.<sup>1</sup>

*Fourteenth Century*.—Dante, *Purgatorio* VIII, 97 ff., significantly describes the serpent, which he sees in the Valley of the Princes, as a real zoölogical serpent, yet says it was perhaps such a one that gave Eve the bitter food. Sordello in pointing it out, moreover, calls it the adversary:

“Vedi là il nostro avversaro.”

In all the account of the earthly paradise which fills the concluding cantos of the *Purgatorio* there is no allusion to a human-headed serpent.

*Speculum Gy de Warewyke*, circa 1310, tells nothing of the form of the serpent in the passage about the fall of man.

*Clannesse*, circa 1370 (in *Early English Alliterative Poems*, London 1869), contains nothing about the form of the serpent. Nor is there anything in the following: *ȝe lyff of Adam and Eve*, (circa 1375) (C. Horstmann, *Sammlung altenglischer Legenden*, Heilbronn, 1878–81); and *Canticum de Creatione*, (circa 1375) (Horstmann, *Sammlung*, etc.).

Chaucer, as I have already observed, expounds the story of the temptation and fall of man without the least hint of anything like a human-headed serpent.

Summing up, we find that the only literary sources for the tradition prior to its appearance in the mystery plays are: Peter Comestor, Vincent de Beauvais, Guido delle Colonne, and,—if it is really earlier than the Chester play,—the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis*.

Though these are very important works, and works no doubt consulted by the writers of plays,—especially Comestor and the

<sup>1</sup> Note also that Chaucer, in *The Marchantes Tale* (E 2057–60), employs the figure of the scorpion in his apostrophe to ‘sudden hap’ or fortune:

O sodeyn hap, O thou fortune instable,  
 Lyk to the scorioun so deceivable,  
 That flatterest with thyn heed when thou wolt stinge;  
 Thy tayl is deeth, thugh thyn envenyminge!

*Speculum*,—it is doubtful, in view of the evidence before us, whether their popularity was sufficient to affect the traditions of artists. If such learned men as Dante, Chaucer, and the author of *Ancren Riwe*, ignore the picturesque and startling notion of Comestor, I cannot regard it as probable that artists, a century or more after Comestor's death should suddenly decide on his account to break their own tradition of more than a thousand years.

## II

### THE ART FORM

That the artists' tradition was simple and unbroken for more than a thousand years, is readily seen if one takes up the representations in art of the serpent tempter, from the earliest down to Michaelangelo's and Raphael's frescoes, and the painting of Titian. Art in the first centuries of the Christian era, it will be remembered, was almost entirely symbolic. I have found no example of a narrative treatment of the story of the temptation earlier than the ninth or tenth century.

Adam and Eve with the tree of knowledge and the serpent, were represented in art from the early centuries of Christianity as the symbol of original sin. That is to say, the iconograph turned the mind of the devout believer to the thoughts of his inherited wickedness, the curse of labor, the coming of death, and the need of a redeemer.

Thus on the famous sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, now in the crypt of St. Peter's, Adam stands on one side of the tree holding a sheaf of wheat; Eve on the other holding a sheep; each holds a fig-leaf as being conscious of shame; the serpent twined about the tree trunk is a simple zoölogical serpent. The design is purely symbolic, the sheaf and sheep indicating, with an appropriate division of labor, labor's primal curse; the tree and serpent, the first cause of man's mortality. It is not a representation of the tempting and fall of man within the Garden of Eden, nor of his toil without the gates, but a symbol of both. Thus it is suitable on the sarcophagus of a Christian, in a series that is dominated triumphantly by symbols of the redemption and resurrection.

From the second century to the eighth century, inclusive, whether in gold-glass decoration, medal, plate, sarcophagus, or fresco, the design is symbolic and the serpent is purely zoölogical. With the beginning of the ninth century there is a suggestion of a representative or narrative treatment in the picturing of the

serpent as apart from the tree, erect on the tip of his tail. Thereafter the artists take slightly more liberty with the subject, but it is not until the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century that we find the tempter represented with a human head. Even after the introduction of the human head, however, the temptation is very commonly shown with a simple zoölogical serpent, the same artist sometimes—Lukas Cranach for instance—impartially giving, in separate pictures, both types.<sup>1</sup>

The human-headed serpent in art flourishes in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries—that is, at the same time as the mystery plays.

Though I have relegated to a footnote (p. 290) the discussion of possible influences of classical and oriental mythology upon the formation of the monstrous woman-headed serpent in Christian art, yet because of their striking similarity to much later forms I shall begin my list of the human-headed serpent in art with two or three examples that I believe have nothing to do with that tradition of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries which gave the serpent in Eden a human head.

*Bronze Statuary.*—Egypt. Ancient bronze figures of Isis and Serapis<sup>2</sup> in the form of cobras with human heads. Isis wears a royal headdress, has the hair and face and also the *mammæ* of a woman, the latter being on the anterior or ventral surface of the cobra's distended "hood," or neck.

*Gem.*—Rome (?) in the earliest epoch of Christian art. A Christian,—or Christ (?)—with a monogram cross bends as though exorcising a serpent-like monster on which he stands. The monster has the head and arms of a human being, but terminates in a barbed tail. The ventral surface is covered with

<sup>1</sup> The following works give much information, accompanied by a wealth of cuts, illustrative of the old traditional representation of Adam and Eve and the Serpent: O. M. Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, Oxford, 1911; Jean Ebersolt, 'Sculptures Chrésiennes Inédites du Musée de Constantinople,' *R. Arch.* Vol. XXI; R. Garucci, *Storia dell' Arte Cristiana*, Prato, 1879; Carl Maria Kaufmann, *Handbuch der christlichen Archäologie*, Paderborn, 1913; Kaufmann, Mogk, Hirt, etc., *Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters*, Leipzig, 1897; H. Leclercq, *Manuel d'Archéologie Chrétienne*, Paris, 1907; Walter Lowrie, *Monuments of the Early Church*, New York, 1901; Orazio Marucchi, *Guida del Museo Cristiano Lateranense*, Rome, 1898; J. O. Westwood, *Palaeographia Sacra Pictoria*, London [1843–45].

<sup>2</sup> Roscher, *Lexikon der griech. und röm. Mythologie*, II, p. 538, s.v. Isis. Roscher speaks of similar treatment on silver armlets from Naucratis, and refers to the *Third Memoir of Egyptian Exploration Fund*, London, 1888.

numerous *mammæ*. (Didron, *Christian Iconography*, English translation II, p. 201, Fig. 226.)

*Coin* of Valentinian III, Roman Empire, fifth century. A figure holding in the left hand a globe surmounted by a small Victory, and in the right a long staff tipped with a Greek cross, stands with the right foot upon the human head of a serpent. The human-headed serpent may represent the barbarians or other enemies of the Empire. (Cohen and Feuarent, *Descr. historique des Monnaies frappées sous l'Empire Romain*, VIII, p. 212, No. 19.)

The above designs have obviously nothing to do with Adam and Eve, and could only by a very remote possibility have had any influence upon the artists of the fourteenth century.

### THIRTEENTH CENTURY

1. *Sculpture*.—Amiens, Notre-Dame. A dragon-like monster with claws and a female head is represented beneath the feet of the Virgin. This is probably in illustration of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Genesis III, 15: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." If so, this is the serpent of the temptation, and perhaps the earliest case in which it is represented with a human head. (Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire Raisonné de l'Architecture*, IX, p. 369.)

### THIRTEENTH OR FOURTEENTH CENTURY

2. *Illumination* (Fig. 1).—*Biblia cum Figuris*, Paris, Bibl. Nat., MSS. Fr. No. 9561, fol. 8a.<sup>1</sup> Adam and Eve are on opposite sides of the tree,—Eve at the left and Adam at the right, and each is tasting an apple. The serpent, whose enormous folds seem thicker than the trunk of the tree he entwines, bifurcates near the anterior extremity and bears two human heads!

This unique<sup>2</sup> representation causes the good Didron to remark:

<sup>1</sup> Omont, *Cat. Général des Manuscrits Français*, No. 9561. "Partie d'une "Bible historiée toute figurée." Miniatures italiennes à chaque page. XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Parchemin. cf. *Hist. litt. de la France*, XXXI, pp. 246-251." This manuscript is assigned to the year 1340 in the list of illustrations in the English translation of Didron, *Christian Iconography*, II, p. 437. This list of illustrations seems to be a compilation of the translator (cf. II, p. 84). It may be added that the portion of the translation relating to these representations of the Fall (pp. 139-140) is somewhat abridged from *Annales Archéologiques*, I, pp. 131-132, where the number of the manuscript is not given.

<sup>2</sup> Didron cites no other example, and I know of none.

"The serpent has occasionally two heads, one female with which to address the man, the other male with which to address the woman." Peter Comestor's dictum, "*similia similibus applaudunt*" is thus reversed. But unless the original be very different from the cut Didron gives, it would seem hopeless to attempt to distinguish male from female in these little faces.

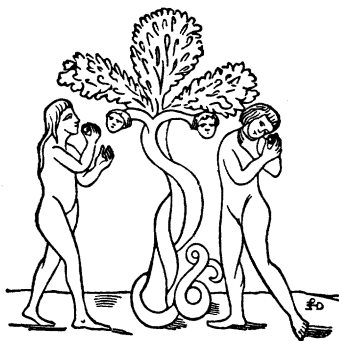


FIGURE 1.—FROM MS. IN PARIS  
(After Didron)

A much simpler explanation of the duplication of the human head on this serpent would be that the artist wished to suggest motion, the serpent watching both Adam and Eve after the temptation. Progressive action

suggested by repeating a figure in the same composition is, of course, familiar in mediaeval art: there is an example of it in the next picture I shall discuss. The difficulty lies in the fact that only the head and neck are duplicated, not the whole serpent. This is strange, indeed, and I believe unique. But as the most ancient tradition held the serpent twined about the tree, the artist could not very well repeat the whole serpent's body. If this explanation seem strained, I can only add that to me it is not half so bizarre as the idea that the miniaturist intended to represent the tempter as having two human heads. To have given him even one human head was surely a sufficient innovation. (Didron, *op. cit.* II, p. 139; *Annales Archéologiques*, I, p. 132, fig. 5, where, however, the design is reversed.)

3. *Illumination*.—France. Paris, Bibl. Nat., MSS. Fr. No. 9561, fol. 8. The serpent in this design has head and arms that are human, the head being with its calm features and long hair almost the exact counterpart of Eve's.

Eve is shown first in the conventional position at the right of the tree, receiving an apple from the serpent; and again at the left of the tree tempting Adam, who kneels on one knee with his back to the tree and serpent, and looks over his shoulder at Eve. In this part both Adam and Eve have apples in both hands. Here the repetition of the figure of Eve within the frame and composition of one little miniature is, clearly enough, an indica-

tion of action. It would not occur to anyone to say that the artist had represented two Eves! (Didron, Vol. II, p. 140; *Annales Archéologiques*, I, p. 132, fig. 6.)

4. *Illumination*.—England, British Museum MS. Reg. 2Bvii, Queen Mary's Psalter. Adam is at the left of the tree; Eve at the right reaches up to seize an apple.

The serpent has the "head of a beautiful woman and the body of a dragon," says Wright. The serpent tail is entwined about the trunk of the tree; the "body" is small and seems to be furnished with only one pair of limbs,—hind legs of the mammal quadruped type. It is interesting to compare this with the type shown in the French MS. cited by Didron, which gives the tempter only one pair of limbs—the arms of a woman; and also with that picture of van der Goes which gives four limbs to the human-headed monster, all four being reptilian. Three demons are represented in this illumination besides the serpent tempter. (Wright, *History of Caricature*, p. 73; Warner, *Queen Mary's Psalter*, pl. 5.)

5. *Illumination* (Fig. 2).—Munich, MS., Clm 146. The oldest manuscript of the *Speculum humane salvationis*. Here, as in the many other illustrated manuscripts of this work,<sup>1</sup> the artists naturally followed the text in representing the tempter with a woman's head. (Lutz and Perdrizet, *Speculum humane salvationis*, II, pl. 2.)

6. *Painting* (Fig. 3).—Hamburg. The Grabower altar from St. Peter's, by Master Bertram, 1379; now in the Hamburg Museum.

Two of a series or cycle of little paintings on the so-called *Grabower altar* show the serpent tempter with a human head. The cycle as a whole (as I shall endeavor to show in another article) has a most important bearing upon the mystery plays. (A. Lichtwark, *Meister Bertram*, Hamburg 1905.)

7. *Painting* (Fig. 4).—Italy, by an unknown artist. The main

<sup>1</sup> Lutz and Perdrizet, *op. cit.* I, pp. ix–xvii record 205 Latin manuscripts, over 60 of which contain miniatures. The general type of the miniatures of the Temptation is described (I, p. 184) as follows: "Le 'Serpent' est représenté par les miniaturistes du *Speculum* comme une bête monstrueuse, à corps de dragon ailé, à long col, et à tête de jeune fille. Dans la miniature de A, ses ailes sont entrouvertes, et de sa bouche sort un dard bifide, indique par un léger trait de minium. Même serpent dans C que dans A, sauf qu'il lui manque le dard." A and C are closely related fourteenth century manuscripts in Paris (Bibl. Nat., MSS. Lat. 9584; Arsenal, MSS. Lat. 593), written in an Italian hand, and with miniatures showing Giottesque influence.



FIGURE 2.—FROM SPECULUM HUMANAЕ SALVATIONIS: MUNICH.

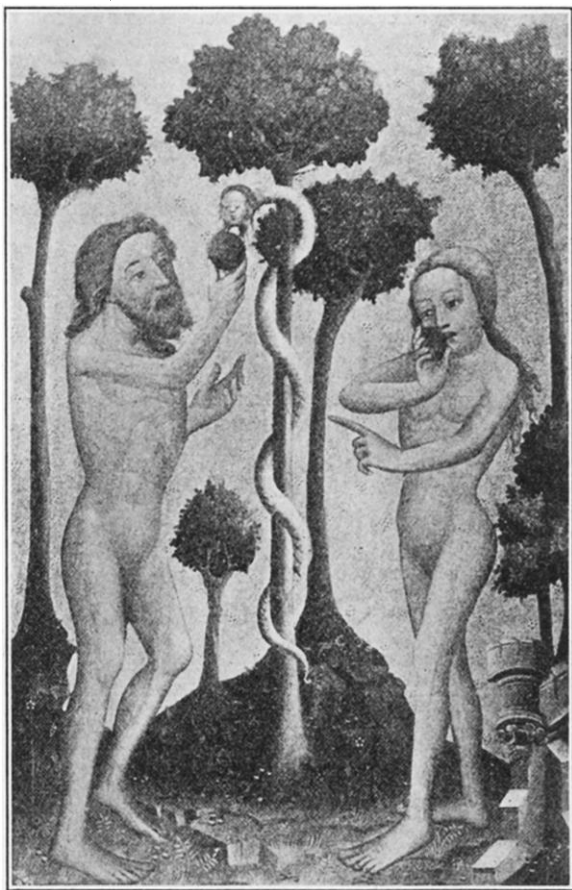


FIGURE 3.—GRABOWER ALTAR: MASTER BERTRAM.



FIGURE 4.—FROM AN ITALIAN PAINTING: CLEVELAND.



subject is a Madonna suckling the infant. Below, in a horizontal panel, Eve is shown reclining, and near her the serpent with a female head. (Lent to the Cleveland Museum by Mrs. L. E. Holden.)

8. *Stained Glass*.—Mulhouse. The choice of scenes seems influenced by the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, and naturally the serpent has a human head. (Lutz and Perdrizet, *op. cit.* II, pl. 101.)

#### FOURTEENTH OR FIFTEENTH CENTURY

9. *Illumination*.—Germany or Austria. Vienna Hofbibliothek, MS. No. 2980 (Ambras 259) *Lutwins Adam und Eva*.<sup>1</sup> The picture, of which no reproduction is given, is thus described by the editors of the manuscript: "Bild: In der Mitte ein Baum mit Blättern und Früchten (Äpfeln?); darum die Schlange mit menschlichem Antlitz und Krone gewunden; Eva hat bereits eine Frucht in der Hand."

#### FIFTEENTH CENTURY

10. *Painting*.—Florence, Brancaccio Chapel in the Church of the Carmine, by Masolino, *ca.* 1425. The tempter is a serpent with a rather small human<sup>2</sup> head. (Woltmann and Woermann, II, p. 277; Venturi, *Storia dell' Arte Italiana*, VII, Part I, p. 103.)

11. *Relief*.—Bologna, San Petronio, by Jacopo della Quercia, *ca.* 1426–1438. The temptation scene is one of a series giving the whole story of Adam and Eve. The serpent has a human head. It is interesting to note that to della Quercia even the great Michelangelo is said to have been indebted. (Venturi, *op. cit.* VI, pp. 87 ff.)

12. *Relief*.—Florence, Baptistry, the famous bronze doors by Lorenzo Ghiberti; 1424–1447 (second door). On the second door, Ghiberti's masterpiece, are depicted in one composition the creation of Adam and of Eve and the story of the temptation. The serpent in the temptation scene has a human head. (*Iconographic Encyclopedia*, Philadelphia, 1887, Vol. III, pl. 23, Fig. 4.)

13. *Illumination*.—Paris, Bibl. Nat., MSS. Fr., 6275. Miélot's

<sup>1</sup> Konrad Hofmann und Wilhelm Meyer aus Speyer, *Lutwins Adam und Eva*, Tübingen, 1881.

<sup>2</sup> In this case as in a good many others, the head, though it might be called a woman's because of its mild expression and its locks, is not necessarily feminine.

French translation (1448) of the *Speculum humanae salvationis*. (Lutz and Perdrizet, *op. cit.* II, pl. 129.)

14. *Woodcut*.—Germany, xylographic copy, of the *Biblia Pauperum*, ca. 1440–1450,<sup>1</sup> in the Heidelberg University library. The serpent with human head appears twice in this book: (1) Plate I,—The Annunciation, which is accompanied by the explanation that it was foretold in God's words to the serpent, has as a "type" beside it a picture of God cursing the serpent. (2) Plate X,—The Temptation of Christ has as a "type" the temptation of Adam and Eve. In this the serpent is crowned. (*Biblia Pauperum* [facsimile], Graphische Gesellschaft, Berlin, 1906.)

15. *Illumination*. Venice, Breviary Grimani, Bibl. Marc. The Fall: The devil is human, but for his claw feet and long tail. He stands on the ground, hiding behind the tree. (Facsimile edited by Zanotto, pl. 45.)

16. *Illumination*.—Savoy, the *Très riches Heures* of the Duke de Berry illuminated by Jean Colombe, illuminator of the ducal court of Charles I of Savoy; now in the Musée Condé, Chantilly. A decorative structure resembling a monstrance occupies the centre of the design; possibly representing the *tree of life*(?). At the left is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, with the serpent. The serpent has the head, arms, and bust of a woman. (Durrien, *Les très riches heures de Jean de France, Duc de Berry*, pl. XVIII; Venturi, *op. cit.* VII, Part I, p. 133.)

17. *Painting* (Fig. 5).—Ghent, by Hugo van der Goes, now in the imperial gallery at Vienna. Adam and Eve stand at the left of the tree and the tempter at the right. The "serpent" is here a lizard with a child's head, standing upon its hind legs, supporting itself by holding the tree trunk with its forelegs, and gazing almost wistfully up at Eve, who, quite ignoring it, reaches calmly with her left hand for an apple. The child-faced tempter is furnished with two little pigtales which stick up absurdly over the temples—and what hard heart will not receive it for a horned demon? I shall have more to say of this remarkable picture. (J. Destrée, *Hugo van der Goes*, pp. 32 (pl.), 38–40; E. Heidrich, *Alt-Niederländische Malerei*, Jena, 1910, pl. 72.)

<sup>1</sup> The date of the first *Biblia Pauperum* was perhaps as early as the twelfth century. I shall discuss this elsewhere, in considering the significance of the work in its relation to other cyclic treatments of Bible story.

This Heidelberg *Biblia Pauperum* is, according to Paul Kristeller, the oldest xylographic copy. The pictures are made on movable wood-blocks so that groups of woodcuts may be variously assembled and printed together. The text, however, is filled in by hand.

18. *Painting*.—In the library of Schloss Frens. It is the work of a painter of the Netherlands living at the end of the fifteenth

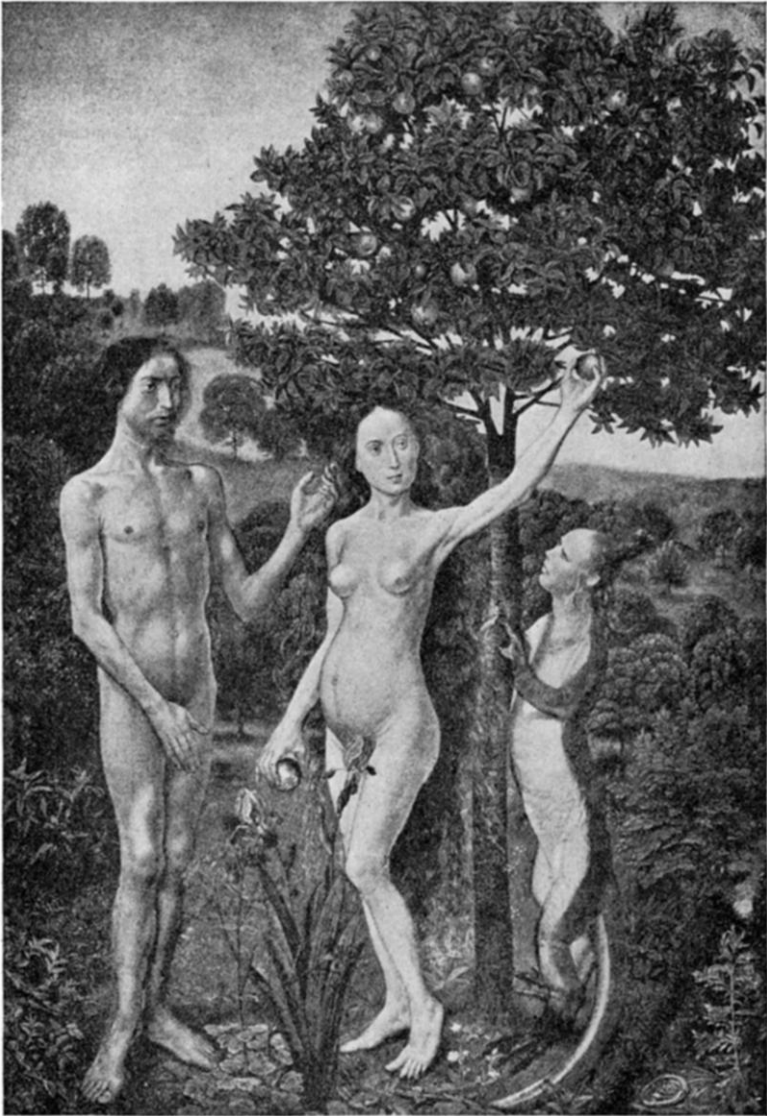


FIGURE 5.—THE TEMPTATION, HUGO VAN DER GOES: VIENNA.

century, and closely related to Hugo van der Goes. It is very

like the Vienna painting, but represents Adam and Eve in Paradise, while the devil, who is almost the same as van der Goes', is hiding behind a tree in the background, apparently planning the temptation. (P. Clemen, *Die Kunstdenkmäler der Rheinprovinz*, IV, 3, p. 70, pl. VII.)

19. *Painting*.—Florence, decorative detail in the Annunciation by Lorenzo di Credi, in the Uffizi, ca. 1480. The influence of the *Biblia Pauperum* is seen in this association of the Old Testament type with the New Testament story,<sup>1</sup> indicating that the prophecy made in the Garden of Eden is about to be fulfilled in the incarnation of Christ. The three panels under di Credi's Annunciation show (1) the creation of Eve, (2) the temptation, and (3) the expulsion from Eden. The serpent tempter has a human head. (Venturi, *op. cit.* VII, Part II, p. 798.)

20. *Woodcut*.—Venice, in the *Supplementum Chronicarum* of Jacobus Philippus, 1486–1491. The serpent has a human head. (Jacques Rosenthal, *Incunabula Typographica*, p. 71.)

21. *Painting* (Fig. 6).—Padua, The Madonna of Victory by Andrea Mantegna, 1496; now in the Louvre. Adam and Eve are represented in a relief upon the magnificent throne on which the Madonna is seated. The composition is according to the most approved tradition—Adam standing at the left, Eve at the right, the serpent twined about the tree in the middle—save that the serpent has a human head. (*Masters in Art*, VI, Part 64.)



FIGURE 6.—MANTEGNA.

22. *Woodcuts* (Fig. 7).—These woodcuts were printed in an edition of the *Speculum humanae salvationis* by Peter Drach of Speier in 1479. Pl. 4 shows Eve and the serpent, who has female head and breasts; Pl. 5 shows Eve giving Adam the apple, while the serpent is coiled on the tree; it has a female head. The illuminator of the Munich manuscript (No. 5) has omitted the

<sup>1</sup> "And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field: upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." *Genesis*, III, 14, 15.

serpent in this scene. (H. Naumann, *Die Holzschnitte des Meisters von Amsterdamer Kabinett zum Spiegel menschlichen*



FIGURE 7.—FROM SPECULUM HUMANAЕ SALVATIONIS, 1479.

*Behaltnis*. Strassburg, 1910. *Studien zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, Heft 126.)

23. *Woodcut*.—Geneva, initial letter 'M' on title page of the Missal of Bellot. Adam is at the left and Eve at the right of the tree. The serpent, wound about the trunk and looking out from a fork in the branches, offers the apple to Eve. It has human head and arms. (O. Jennings, *Early Woodcut Initials*, London, 1908, p. 164.)

#### SIXTEENTH CENTURY

24. *Tapestry*.—Brussels, by an artist or artists of distinction not certainly identified, ca. 1500; now in the possession of Baron de Zuylen de Nyevelt de Haar, Château de Haar, Belgium. This is one of a famous group of tapestries, unfortunately now widely separated, which clearly reflect the influence of religious drama.<sup>1</sup>

The serpent in the temptation has four limbs, the hind legs, on which it stands, apparently more like those of a dog than of a

<sup>1</sup> D. T. B. Wood, 'Tapestries of the Seven Deadly Sins' *Burl. Mag.* XX, p. 210, says: "Through all of them run two leading motives: the religious history of the Redemption as it appears in various cycles of Miracle Plays, and the moral allegory of the conflict of Virtues and Vices."

reptile—but I cannot be sure of this. It has a woman's head with long flowing hair, and human arms. Wood comments on the kindly expression of its face. (*Burl. Mag.* XX, p. 215.)

25. *Illumination*.—Munich, Bavarian National Museum, No. 861. A prayer book of the end of the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth century. The serpent has a woman's head and arms; the upper part of the body is hidden behind the tree, around which the serpent is coiled. (L. von Kobell, *Kunstvolle Miniaturen und Initialen aus Handschriften von IV–XVI Jahrh.*, p. 92.)

26. *Painting*.—Rome, Sistine Chapel, ceiling by Michelangelo, 1508–1512. To describe Michelangelo's design of the temptation would, I suppose, be a work of supererogation. It is to be noted, however, that the tempter is a woman to the hips, and that the voluminous folds of the serpent portion encircling the tree strongly suggest a duplicate tail. If the serpent portion is really intended to be double, then Michelangelo is creating a new type,—possibly being influenced by the bifurcated mermaidens of classical art, or the Scylla<sup>1</sup> of Virgil:

<sup>1</sup> Whoever has studied Virgil in Greenough and Kittredge's edition will remember the cut illustrating the description of the monster Scylla. See p. 290, note 2, in which I discuss Lilith, Lamia, etc.

Milton speaks of the serpent in the temptation as "Mere serpent in appearance," and describes it with some particularity, thus:

"So spake the Enemy of Mankind, enclosed  
In serpent, inmate bad, and toward Eve  
Addressed his way—not with indented wave,  
Prone on the ground, as since, but on his rear  
Circular base of rising folds, that towered  
Fold above fold, a surging maze; his head  
Crested aloft, and carbuncle his eyes;  
With burnished neck of verdant gold, erect  
Amidst his circling spires, that on the grass  
Floated redundant."

*Paradise Lost*, Book IX, ll. 494–503.

But in the second book, when describing the monster at the gate of Hell personifying Sin, though avowedly borrowing from Virgil's description of Scylla, Milton may have had a shadowy recollection of some of the numerous examples of Christian art in which the serpent tempter is given a form half woman and half serpent:

"The one seemed woman to the waist, and fair,  
But ended foul in many a scaly fold,  
Voluminous and vast—a serpent armed  
With mortal sting. About her middle round  
A cry of Hell-hounds never-ceasing barked—"

*Paradise Lost*, Book II, ll. 650–654.

At least Milton makes this spawn of Satan end in serpent, not in dolphin tails.

*Prima hominis facies et pulchro pectore virgo  
pube tenus, postrema immani corpore pristis, [i.e. pistris]  
delphinum caudas utero commissa luporum.*

*Æneid, III. 426-428.*

I think it will be clear to the reader now that Michelangelo was following a tradition in making the serpent half woman, a tradition by this time about two hundred years old. (*Masters in Art*, II, part 17.)

27. *Painting* (Fig. 8).—Rome, fresco in the Camera della Segnatura of the Vatican, by Raphael, 1511. Adam is seated at the left of the tree, and Eve stands at the right holding a branch with her left hand as with her right she proffers the apple to Adam. The serpent is simply a serpent as far as it appears below the fork of the tree, but above the fork it assumes the face and shoulders of a woman, bending an expectant glance toward Adam. (Champlin and Perkins, *Cyclopedia of Painters*, 1892; E. Müntz, *Raphael*, English transl., London 1888, p. 276.)

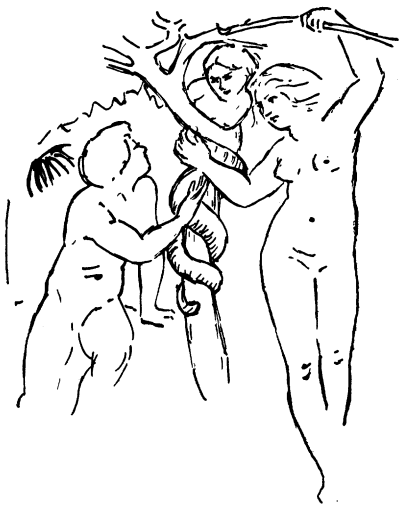


FIGURE 8.—RAPHAEL.

28. *Terra-cotta relief* (Fig. 9).—Florence, from the workshop of the Della Robbias, ca. 1515; now in the collection of Mr. Henry Walters, Baltimore. Adam and Eve are conventionally arranged on either side of the tree; the serpent has a human head. (*Burl. Mag.* XX, p. 36.)

29. *Painting* (Fig. 10).—Rome, fresco by pupils after Raphael's designs, in the loggie of the Vatican, 1516-1518. This design resembles the Adam and Eve by Raphael in the Camera della Segnatura in its general composition, save that the figures are reversed: Eve is at the left, and Adam seated at the right. The serpent (unlike the serpent of the Camera) has no shoulders,—only the head, which is charmingly feminine, being human.

30. *Painting*.—Saxony. A large composition giving the whole story of Adam and Eve, by Lukas Cranach, 1530; now in Vienna.

This composition is remarkable because Cranach has several times painted Adam and Eve without any human-headed serpent—*e.g.* his Adam and Eve in the Dresden gallery. The whole story

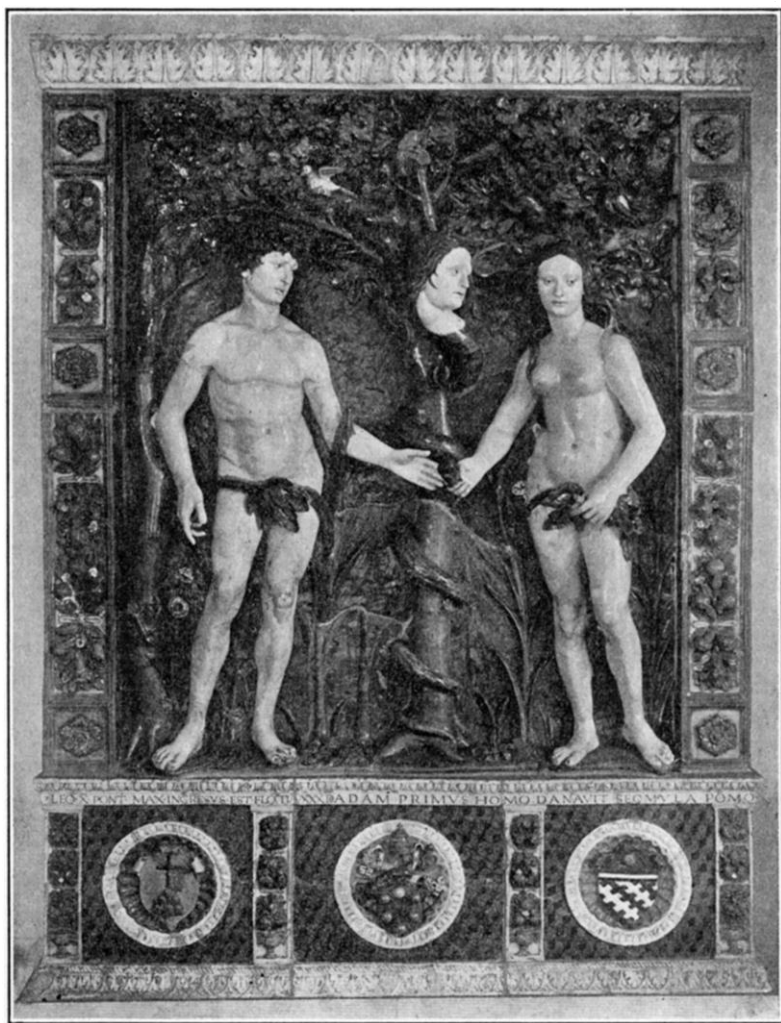


FIGURE 9.—TERRACOTTA RELIEF: SCHOOL OF THE DELLA ROBBIA.

being given in one composition, it is perhaps the more natural to suppose that this painting might have come under the influence of the plays. The serpent has the head, bust, and arms of a



woman. (Ed. Heyck, *Lukas Cranach, Künstler-Monographien*, Leipzig, 1908.)

31. *Woodcut*.—Bavaria, "Dance of Death" designed by Hans Holbein the Younger, ca. 1538.



FIGURE 10.—SCHOOL OF RAPHAEL

In the Adam and Eve design the serpent, which is coiled above with head down, has a woman's head. (G. Hirth, *Kulturgeschichtliches Bilderbuch*, Munich, 1883, II, p. 651.)

32. *Stained Glass*.—Rouen, Saint-Vincent's church ca. 1550; subject, the *Triumph of Sin*. On the triumphal car the serpent, with the head and bust of a woman, is entwined

about the trunk of the tree, and has floating above it a banner decorated with the image of Death. (E. Mâle, *L'Art Religieux de la Fin du Moyen Age*, p. 309.)

33. *Woodcut*.—Antwerp, by an artist employed by Plantin, 1569. The serpent has a human head. ('A Booke of Christian Prayers,' in *Fine Art Quarterly Rev.*, 1867, p. 157.)

34. *Painting*.—Venice, by Titian, 1570; now in the Prado, Madrid. The serpent has a child's head and arms, and duplicate tail. (A. Weese, *Der Schöne Mensch*, II, pl. 39 A.)

35. *Painting*.—Holland, by Cornelisz van Haarlem, 1592; now in the Rijks Museum, Amsterdam. The serpent with human head and arms leans down to offer Eve the apple. (R. Muther, *Geschichte der Malerei*, Leipzig, 1909, p. 65.)

### III

#### THE PLAYS

Though the artists before the fourteenth or fifteenth century could not be assumed to be sufficiently learned or independent to search out old commentators and from their texts derive new forms and modes of pictorial representation,<sup>1</sup>—for with all their

<sup>1</sup> G. Cohen, *Histoire de La Mise en Scène dans le Théâtre Religieux Français du Moyen Age*, pp. 129-131; E. Mâle, 'Le renouvellement de l'art par les Mystères,' *Gaz. B-A*. XXXI, 1904, four articles.

talents 'these fine folk knew no Latin,' and followed only what was before their eyes or was dictated by more learned men,—on the other hand the authors of the plays were necessarily learned. To quote M. Cohen, "the clerks, chaplains, bishops or doctors who dictated what was needful to the artisans were also those who made, organized, and put on (*montaient*) the mystery plays, whether in the choir, in the nave, or in public places. Their material was drawn either directly from the Bible, or more often from Scholastic Histories, Bestiaries, Lectionaries, the Compendia (*les Sommes*) of every sort; they searched in the apocryphal works of Bede and St. Augustine, in Isidore of Seville, Peter Comestor, Honoré d'Autun, Vincent de Beauvais, or in the *Meditations* of St. Bonaventure."

Just one point of difficulty remains to be cleared up. If the artists were not responsible for the sudden introduction of the human-headed serpent into Eden because they were too unlettered, it may seem strange that the "producers" of the mystery plays, who were undoubtedly learned, and generally pious in their intentions, should have sanctioned such an unprecedented and undoctrinal monster.

"Satan chose," says Peter Comestor, "a certain kind of serpent, as Bede, says, having a virginal face, because like things applaud like." Here is a comment of no doctrinal value, a sort of thing ignored by even such learned poets as Dante and Chaucer. Had it any practical value for the stage managers of the primitive drama? That is logically the next question.

To answer this question let us consider the presentation of the Anglo-Norman *Jeu d'Adam*, which is generally conceded to belong to the mid-twelfth century, just Comestor's time.<sup>1</sup> It is at all events the oldest vernacular Adam play, and, indeed, semi-liturgic in character.

In this charming little play, Satan first comes on the stage *in propria persona* in order to converse with Eve, and only after this attempt has failed does the serpent play its part. At first the dialogue takes great freedom with Scripture, the seductive Satan flattering Eve with many pretty words, calling her a frail and tender thing, more fresh than a rose and more fair than crys-

<sup>1</sup> The dissenting opinion of Paul Meyer is cited by Cohen (*op. cit.*, p. 51): "Je ne vois pas, écrit le savant romaniste, de raison positive pour attribuer à l'Angleterre ce petit mystère qui ne paraît pas antérieur à la première moitié du XIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle. (*Romania*, 1903, p. 637.)"

tal; but when the time comes for the fatal dialogue of Genesis, the play is obliged to omit it because the serpent is mechanical and cannot speak. Eve bends to listen, but no words are audible:

*"Tunc serpens artificiose compositus ascendit juxta stipitem arboris vetite. Cui Eva propius adhibebit aurem, quasi ipsius ascultans consilium; dehinc accipiet Eva pomum porriget Ade. Ipse vero nondum eum accipiet, et Eva dicet"*—etc.

A charming tableau truly, but not a complete success, is achieved.<sup>1</sup> It must have been a disappointment to the pious author not to be able to include in the climax the very scripture of the temptation scene.

It is easy to imagine that this same disappointment stimulated some later author to seize upon Peter Comestor's text with its apparently ancient and venerable sanction in Bede. Thereafter and particularly in such plays as included the story of the fall of the angels, it would be but natural to have the youth who played the rebellious Lucifer<sup>2</sup> put on the "sort of serpent" skin or costume, while adapting himself to the rôle of tempter in Eden. A fair-faced lad with flowing hair would equally well present the glorious angel before his fall, and the "sort of serpent with a virginal face" approved by Comestor. Other advantages besides the facilitation of the dialogue are apparent. The serpent would be able to walk and stand before the curse compelled him to crawl upon his belly—that is, in those cases in which he took the form of a lizard; and he would be instantly recognized by the audience as identical with Lucifer, both by his face and voice, and sometimes by his crown.

If the pictures we have considered actually reflect the influence of the plays, it would seem that there were two distinct types of presentation of the serpent:

(1) That in which it is simply a serpent below, with no hind legs; and human above, sometimes the head alone, and sometimes with arms and more or less of the trunk;

(2) That in which it has the body, or at least the hindquarters

<sup>1</sup> Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 60, commenting on the fineness of suggestion in the directions, says there are other gestures so exquisite that one might believe they were indicated by a painter. Adam receiving the apple that Eve proffers reminds him of the famous panels of Van Eyck. Does he momentarily forget that the actors are gowned and standing behind curtains which screen them to the shoulders?

<sup>2</sup> Or one like him, if the *Temptation* were given by a different guild.

and tail of a dragon or lizard; and the head, or head and trunk, human.

In the case of (1) there could be no walking about on the stage, but the player would be obliged to lie concealed at the foot of the tree until his cue came to crawl up the trunk. This is precisely the stage direction of a Lucerne play of 1583 in the case of a human-headed, four-limbed serpent. After the curse, however, he is directed to crawl on all fours away to Hell (*vff allen Vieren wider durch die Hell hinweg*), *i.e.*, out through Hell-mouth.

In the case of (2) I think that, except in some continental stationary performances, the player generally walked on his "hind legs." In the Gréban Passion play—Eden scene,<sup>1</sup>—and in plays expounded by Klimke and by Brandstetter it is expressly stated that this is not to be done; but in the English Chester play the fallen angel puts on his serpent disguise and enters Eden while or just after speaking a soliloquy; in the York play the *directions* imply walking; in the Hegge play it seems necessary; the serpent's costume in the Norwich play seems to be adapted thereto; a sixteenth century Breton play which indicates that the serpent had feet and hands before the curse,—though after it he has to be carried out by fellow demons,—seems to imply that at first he walked; the Low-German play by Arnold Immesen says that Lucifer enters paradise and climbs the tree as a serpent *in specie virginis*.

It is to be noted that in both pictures and plays the serpent is sometimes crowned. This is the case in the temptation scene in the *Biblia Pauperum*. But let the plays themselves now give their testimony.

It is possible that the play described by the Regensburg Annals as including the creation of the angels, the fall of Lucifer, the creation and fall of man, and the prophets, anticipated the method of presenting the serpent which we find in the English Chester play more than a century later, but I am unable to say that it is probable. The notice in the annals gives the date of this play as February 7, 1194; according to Carl Klimke this is the earliest mention of a Paradise play in Germany.<sup>2</sup>

In the thirteenth or fourteenth century, a Viennese Passion-play describes the tempter in the Gardep of Eden thus: "*Adam*

<sup>1</sup> "*Icy s'en va Sathan a quatre piez comme un serpent entortiller autour de l'arbre.*" Edition of Gaston Paris.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Klimke, *Das Volkstümliche Paradiesspiel*, Breslau, 1902.

*et Eva sint in paradyso, et serpens dyabolus clam veniens ad Evam et introspectat sicut dicens—*"<sup>1</sup> but gives no further description. Perhaps we may infer from the *clam veniens* and the *dicens* that this moving and speaking serpent is furnished with a human head. The manuscript, according to Froning, though in a hand of about 1320–1330, is doubtless a copy of a thirteenth century play.

This brings us to the probable time of the composition of the Chester plays, the oldest of the English cycles.<sup>2</sup>

In the following tabulation of evidence from plays, I cannot defend as logical my method of classifying by centuries. For the most part I classify plays according to the date of the earliest manuscript. In the case of the Chester plays I take the liberty of attributing the origin to the fourteenth century, to which very likely other of these plays also belong.

#### FOURTEENTH CENTURY

1. Chester, probably composed 1328, by Ranulf Higden. Earliest MS., 1591.

The second Chester play (it follows the play of the *Fall of Lucifer*) includes the creation of the world, divided according to the six days; the creation of Adam and Eve; the temptation and fall; the expulsion from Eden; the story of Cain and Abel.

The Demon tempter,—evidently Lucifer, for he says he was formerly the brightest angel,—approaches Eden soliloquizing.<sup>3</sup> He says he must disguise himself:

A manner of an Adder is in this place,  
that wynges like a byrd she hase,  
feete as an Adder, a maydens face;  
her kinde I will take.

Therefore, as brocke I my pane,  
my adders coate I will put on,  
and into paradise will I gone,  
as fast as ever I may.

<sup>1</sup> R. Froning, *Das Drama des Mittelalters*, Stuttgart, 1891.

<sup>2</sup> E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, Oxford, 1903, Vol. II, pp. 145, and 348–352: discussion of date and evidence for authorship.

<sup>3</sup> The *direction* in one MS. is, "*et veniet serpens ad paradisum positum in specie Demonis et ambulando dicat*"; and in the three other MSS., "*the serpente shall Come up out of a hole and the deville walkinge shal saye.*" See H. Deimling, *The Chester Plays*, London, 1892.

(*Versus: Spinx Volucris penna, serpens pede, fronte puella.*)<sup>1</sup>

After the fall, questioned by God, Eve says,

This adder, lorde, shee was my foe  
and sothelie deceived me thoe,  
and made me to eate that meate.

Then God pronounces the curse and the prophecy, and the serpent goes out hissing,<sup>2</sup>—*Tunc recedet serpens, vocem serpentinam faciens*. Unquestionably, fulfilling the curse, the serpent glided out upon his belly.

## 2. Cornwall, play of fourteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

The play opens with the creation, but lacks the fall of Lucifer. A Latin note (at the end of the fifth day of creation), however, indicates that this was probably played from another manuscript: *hic ludit Lucifer de celo*. Norris interprets this as meaning merely that Lucifer appears at this point!

In the temptation scene the *direction* for the serpent reads: *diabolus tanquam serpens loquitur ad euam in arbore scientie et dicit male ad euam*. The *direction* for Eve reads: *Tunc accipiet pomum et deferet ad adam et dicit Eva*.

In speaking to Adam of the tempter, Eve calls him the 'angel' (*el*); in speaking to God, she calls him the 'serpent' (*sarf*). God, in cursing him, says he shall be cursed above all beasts:—*a gertho war an nor veis*, which Norris translates *which go on the face of the earth*.

In this play, then, we have the tempter described as a *devil like a serpent*, as an *angel*, and as a *serpent*. He speaks, and gives the apple to Eve,—which she *receives*.

## FIFTEENTH CENTURY

3. Einbeck, Prussia, MS. of the first half of the century; by Arnoldus Immessen.<sup>4</sup>

In this play the scene of the temptation follows a rather splendid play, or opera, of the revolt and fall of Lucifer, the creation of man, and conspiracy in Hell, wherein Lucifer announces his intention of going to Eden.

<sup>1</sup> Thus Deimling; Wright, following other MSS., gives it: *superius volucris penna, serpens pede, forma puella*. What Deimling reads "Spinx" may also be intended for *superius*: *superius* is the reading in all other MSS.

<sup>2</sup> Or, possibly, merely making a cry in a "small voice": cf. the Norwich serpent.

<sup>3</sup> Edwin Norris, *Ancient Cornish Drama*, Oxford, 1859.

<sup>4</sup> O. Schönemann, *Der Sündenfall und Marienklage*, Hanover, 1855.

The *direction* which shows the entrance of the serpent gives him specifically the name *Lucifer*, though indicating that the part may be taken by another actor: *lucifer intrat paradifum et ascendit arborem vel aliud nomine ipsius et dicit serpens in specie virginis*.

The audience then is expected to recognize in this walking (?) serpent, Lucifer himself—not merely one of his minions, but the glorious archangel, son of the morning,<sup>1</sup> fallen from Heaven down to that bad eminence, the lordship of Hell. Though a serpent, he wears his serpent guise with a difference,—*in specie virginis*.

Note that he *enters* Paradise and *gets up into* the tree. At the conclusion of his speech of temptation he *gives* the apple to Eve; he has forelimbs then, either reptilian or human:

Num, wif, den appel unde love minem done.

*Et dat fibi pomum*

4. Paris, *Mistère du Viel Testament*,<sup>2</sup> ca. 1450.

In this monumental work the tempter in Eden is thus described:

*Icy doit estre Sathan vestu d'un habit en manière de serpent et le visage de pucelle.*

5. Paris, play of ca. 1452, by Arnoul Gréban.<sup>3</sup>

In this play, in the temptation scene, Satan says:

D'aller en ce point,  
on verroit trop tost ma falace;  
je prendrai virginalle face  
les piez et le corps serpentin.

The *directions* explain the manner of his entrance: *Icy s'en va Sathan a quatre piez comme un serpent entortiller autour de l'arbre.*

6. Lincoln (?)<sup>4</sup>. Ms. of 1468, known as the *Hegge Mysteries*.<sup>5</sup>

The play of the temptation and fall of man is the second of the *Hegge* plays: it is preceded by a play of the days of creation and the fall of Lucifer.

<sup>1</sup> "How art thou fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" *Isaiah*, XIV, 12. This and the following verses constitute the basis for the plays of the revolt of Lucifer.

<sup>2</sup> Edition of J. de Rothschild and E. Picot, in publications of *Société des anciens textes français*, Paris, 1878–1885.

<sup>3</sup> *La Nativité, la Passion, la Resurrection de N.-S. J.-C. par Arnoul Gréban*, edition of Gaston Paris and G. Raynaud, Paris, 1878.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hardin Craig, 'The Coventry Cycle of Plays,' *Athenaeum*, August 16, 1913.

<sup>5</sup> J. O. Halliwell, *Ludus Coventriae*, London, 1841.

No stage directions indicate the entrance of the serpent, but the speeches suggest that he accosts Eve with an apple held out toward her:

*Serpens.* Heyl ffayr wyff and comely dame!  
This frute to ete I the cownsele,  
Take this appyl and ete this ssame

Take this appyl in thin hond,  
And to byte therof thou ffond,  
Take another to thin husbond.

Eve describes the serpent to Adam as a "ffayr aungelle"; and to God as a "worm with an aungelys face," adding "I suppose it was Sathanas."

God in cursing the serpent, and the serpent in replying, intimate that before the curse this serpent walked upright:

*Deus.* Thou wyckyd worm fful of pryde,  
ffowle envye syt be thi syde,  
Upon thi gutt thou xalt glyde  
As worm wyckyd in kende.

*Diabolus.* At thi byddyng ffowle I falle,  
I krepe hem to my stynkyng stalle,  
ffor this ffalle I gynne to qweke,  
With a ——— my breche I breke  
My sorwe comyth ful sone.

Evidently he falls on his belly and glides out.

7. Eger, play of *ca.* 1480.<sup>1</sup>

After the fall of Lucifer, and the creation, Lucifer and his comrades confer. Then Satan, who is here a different person from Lucifer, goes to tempt Eve: *transit ad paradysum dicens Evam.* . . . After his speech, the *direction* calls him a serpent: *Eva respondit serpenti.*

He has hands, for he plucks the apple giving it to Eve: *Et tunc Sathanas frangit pomum dans Eve.* But Eve in speaking of him to Adam calls him "die Schlang"; and speaking to God, "die beese Schlang."

God in cursing him also calls him so: *dicit ad serpentem*

<sup>1</sup> G. Milchsack, *Egerer Fronleichnams-spiel*, Tübingen, 1881.



O Schlang, du solt verflucht sein:  
 Das weiplich pildt das schwechet dich,  
 Dein gang sei nimer aüffrichtigklich,  
 Also der weiplich nam dich krenckt;  
 Hinfuer kreüch auff dem paüch gesenckt.

#### SIXTEENTH CENTURY

8. Lucerne, play of 1545 discussed by Renward Brandstetter.<sup>1</sup>

In this play the serpent tempter is described as,—*Mit eym wybischen Angesicht, bekrönnt, sonst alls ein giftiger Wurm.*

9. Brittany, play of ca. 1550, discussed by l'Abbé Bernard.<sup>2</sup>

In this Celtic play the tempter appears in three different forms: first, as a leopard, second, as an old man; and third, as a serpent. From his position in the tree he addresses Eve, telling her that he is an angel of Heaven. Doubtless the face which appeared from the tree was such as to bear out this assertion. Apparently this serpent had four limbs,—the upper probably human, for God in cursing it says explicitly not only that it shall go on its belly, but that it shall go *without feet or hands* (*Hac nep na dorn na troat*). Then the serpent in the tree cries out, and his fellow demons come to rescue him and carry him away, *because he can no longer walk* (*pa na hell quet querset*).

10. Norwich, MS. of 1565.<sup>3</sup>

The Norwich play of the Temptation and the Expelling of Adam and Eve out of Paradise is supplied with two prologues,—one to be used in case no other play preceded it in performance; the other, in case the play of the creation of Eve (or some other play of the fall of the angels and creation?) were given first. It was performed by the Grocers.

The serpent is not described in the *directions* of the play, but we learn from the Grocers' accounts that he wore a wig, a crown, and "a cote with hosen & tayle steyned." We learn, moreover, that the player who for the sum of 4d. played the serpent in this play in 1534 was named Edmund Thurston.<sup>4</sup>

In the speech of the serpent, before the temptation, and in his

<sup>1</sup> R. Brandstetter, 'Die Luzerner Bühnen-Rodel,' *Germania*, XXX, pp. 205 ff.

<sup>2</sup> l'Abbé Bernard, 'La Création du Mond,' *Revue Celtique*, IX, X, and XI.

<sup>3</sup> O. Waterhouse, *The Non-Cycle Mystery Plays*, London (Early English Text Soc.), 1909.

<sup>4</sup> Waterhouse, *op. cit.* p. xxxiii.

mode of addressing Eve, we get some hints of his characterization: he says that to catch the man and woman he will use subtlety and appear as an angel of light; and he cries to Eve, "Oh lady of felicity, behold my voice so small!" When Eve is questioned by God she says, "The Serpente diseayvyd me with that his fayer face."

11. York, MS. of 1583.<sup>1</sup> Plays were given at York as early as 1378.

The fifth York play gives the story of the temptation. It follows plays of the creation, the fall of Lucifer, creation of man, and the introduction of Adam and Eve into Eden.

Satan begins by expressing his envy of Adam and his determination to betray him. Then he says,

In a worme likness wille y wende,  
And founde to feyne a lowde lesynge.  
Eue, Eue!

To which Eve replies, "Wha es þare?"

*Satanas*: "I, a frende.  
And for thy gude es þe comynge,  
I hydir sought."

When Eve asks who he is that counsels her to eat of the forbidden tree, he replies, "A worme þat wotith wele how þat yhe may wirshipped be."

When Eve is at last convinced, the *direction* reads, *Et tunc debet accipere pomum*. Satan bids her bite on boldly, and goes out: *Tunc Satanas recedet*. Eve describes him both to Adam and to God, as "a worme." God in cursing him says,—

"A! wikkid worme, woo worthe þe ay

. . . . .  
And on thy wombe þan shall þou glyde."

But apparently the York serpent was not proficient in gliding off on his belly, and, having already receded, does not illustrate the biblical curse.

It is to be noted that Satan first says he *will go* in a worm's likeness to betray man, and forthwith begins to call "Eve! Eve!" He apparently comes forward to meet her when she asks "Who is there?" and proffers the apple, for the *direction* says she *receives*<sup>2</sup> it. When she has done so, and he sees she is

<sup>1</sup> Lucy Toulmin Smith, *York Mystery Plays*, Oxford, 1885.

<sup>2</sup> *accipere*, not *capere*.

beginning to eat, he goes out. This is evidently a walking and speaking serpent after the manner of the Chester play. I am satisfied, in the light of the *directions* of the other plays, that this serpent is of the lizard-with-a-lady's-face type.

12. Lucerne, play of 1583.<sup>1</sup>

In this play the serpent tempter appears, *Alls ein vierfüssiger giftiger Wurm angethan vnd gerüst, mit wybischem Angsicht vnd Stimm, ein Huben vnd Cron vff dem Houpt.*

This is the serpent, of which I have already spoken, that lies concealed until its cue comes to appear, but nevertheless crawls off to Hell after it is cursed; it is significant that it lies concealed in the Mount of Olives,<sup>2</sup> where Christ suffered agony and bloody sweat: *Sy zücht nit yn vff den Platz, sonder verbirgt sich frü jn den Oelberg bis es an sy kompt zereden vnd so sy den Fluch emphan-gen, krücht sy vff allen Vieren wider durch die Hell hinweg.*

13. Lucerne, play of 1597.<sup>3</sup>

In this play, as in the Lucerne play of 1583, the serpent lies concealed until his cue to appear: *Zücht ouch nit vff sonder verbirgt sich morgens frü jn Oelberg bis es Zyt jst, macht sy sich vff den Boum.*

#### SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

14. Cornwall,<sup>4</sup> play of 1611, by William Jordan of Wendron.

In this play of the Creation of the world, which probably preserves an old tradition, Lucifer is transformed into,—*A fyne serpent made w<sup>th</sup> a virgyn face & yolowe heare upon her head.*<sup>5</sup>

#### IV

#### HOW FAR THE ARTISTS WERE INFLUENCED BY THE PLAYS

It would be a mistake to suppose that the artists who represented the serpent with a human head were slavishly imitating the figure as presented in the plays, or that one could take any of the pictures and say of it that it showed exactly how the play

<sup>1</sup> R. Brandstetter, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

<sup>2</sup> Adam in this same play lies concealed until his creation in the same spot which is later to be the sepulchre of Christ. This served not only convenience but symbolism.

<sup>3</sup> Brandstetter, *op. cit.*, p. 342.

<sup>4</sup> Edited by Davies Gilbert, with Keigwyn's translation.

<sup>5</sup> O. Waterhouse, *op. cit.*, p. xxxiii; E. K. Chambers, *op. cit.* II, p. 142.

was given. Even those pictures which come nearest to doing so are also somewhat controlled by the older tradition of the artists. The nude figures of Adam and Eve are more lifelike than the leather suits or fleshings worn by the actors could have appeared; the fatal tree, the landscape, often with wild animals, are of a size and elaboration in detail quite beyond the reach of the stage; and the serpent, human head and all, often too diminutive possibly to represent an actor. We shall have to be content to say that the artist in depicting the old familiar scene had altered it solely with regard to what he doubtless considered a matter of fact. He was not trying to show how the plays were given, but to make a devotional picture, and merely relied a little too much on the authority of the writers of the plays.

The temptation scene from the Grabower altar of *Master Bertram* (Fig. 3) is an excellent example of the extent and nature of the play's influence upon the artist. I am convinced that in this case the influence is immediate, because a good many points of contact between plays and art are observable in the cycle of paintings on the Grabower altar. In the temptation scene the serpent is twined about the tree in the middle of the composition, Adam standing on the left reaching for an apple, Eve on the right eating an apple and pointing toward the tree. Except for the human head on the serpent, the whole is almost exactly the arrangement of the ancient tradition in art. The serpent and the human head are obviously too small to represent an actor. The artist has taken the supposed fact of the human head, but has reduced the scale to something like the true dimensions of a serpent. Some secondary influences of the play are perhaps to be found in the stiff trees, the conventional star-sown sky of the background, the bit of architectural detail in the lower right-hand corner (which we know from other pictures in this cycle represents the wall of the Garden of Eden), and the unlikeliness of the nude figures. Of the last point too much should not be made, for the church until a much later date did not countenance the picturing of complete nakedness.

The serpent in *Hugo van der Goes'* painting (Fig. 5) seems to have been painted from a model posed in the very costume of the play—as a four-footed poisonous serpent with a virgin's face. It is a child, most likely a boy, who essays the rôle. Choir-boys from time immemorial had sung the *Gloria in excelsis*, and since the first brief plays of the Nativity, had represented the angelic

choir, singing from the rood-loft or some other elevated place. Now the serpent, being Lucifer himself or one of the defecting angels, comes to tempt Eve with his fair face and small persuasive voice. His adder's coat (with hosen and tail stained, *i.e.* painted) gives him the general appearance of a lizard. His demonic nature is further attested by his little horn-like pigtails. Certainly no artist is under the necessity of suggesting horns in this manner.<sup>1</sup> Goat's horns, characteristic of devils and satyrs, could just as easily have been painted; any sort of small corneous processes peeping through the golden locks would be more suggestive. But anyone who has had the mortifying experience of dropping half a moustache in a theatrical performance will realize the great superiority of horns such as this little devil wears, over any artificial goat's horn attached with fish glue. The pigtail horns are for me the strongest assurances that this serpent is painted directly from an actual performer in a mystery play of Adam. Adam and Eve in the same picture are, on the other hand, evidently painted from nude models and not from performers as they appeared in the play.

I am convinced that the human-headed serpent of Christian art was derived, not from myth or tradition,<sup>2</sup> but from a conven-

<sup>1</sup> The woodcuts of the *Nuremberg Chronicle* show Moses with horns that are apparently locks of hair, but not braided. This, in 1493, about the same time as van der Goes' painting, seems to me to point to a probable influence of a Moses play. The fifteenth century *Biblia Pauperum* shows Moses (Transfiguration scene) in the same manner.

<sup>2</sup> As to Lilith, Lamia, and other female monsters, I have not been able to find any evidence that they were thought of, or represented, in the middle ages, as being half serpent and half woman. Rossetti emphasizes the baneful nature of Lilith, the demon wife of Adam, by making her a partner with the serpent in seeking the Fall of Adam. But Lilith is not, either in Rossetti or in the Hebrew tradition so far as I am able to ascertain a serpent woman. She is a female spirit of the night, sometimes taking the form of a cat, and sometimes that of an owl. The passage in Isaiah (xxiv, 14) which in the King James version reads, "the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest" has this comment on *screech owl*,—"or, *night monster*." In the Hebrew, the word is *Lilith*; in the Vulgate, it is *Lamia*. Wyclif follows the Vulgate, and the marginal comment in the Wyclif Bible is, "lyk a womman above, and hath horse feet bynethe and sleeth hir owne whelpis."

J. Lempriere, in the article *Lamiae* in his *Bibliotheca Classica* (New York, 1833) describes the creatures thus: "Certain monsters of Africa, who had the face and breast of a woman, and the rest of the body like that of a serpent. They allured strangers to come to them; and though they were not endowed with the faculty of speech, yet their hissings were pleasing and agreeable."

tion of the mystery play stage, a convention much more common and widespread than has heretofore been recognised: indeed, it seems to me, with the exception of the Anglo-Norman *Adam* play, almost universal.

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And he gives the following citations: "*Philostr. in Ap.—Horat. Art. Poet. v. 340—Plut. de Curios.—Dion.*"

But in all these references the only thing suggesting the serpent is Apollonius' warning to Menippus: "σὺ μέντοι" εἶπεν "ὁ καλὸς τε καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν καλῶν γυναικῶν θηρευόμενος ὄφιν θάλπεις καὶ σὲ ὄφεις." (IV, 25).

But to say, "You cherish a serpent and a serpent cherishes you," is not by any means to imply that the physical form of the beautiful witch Lamia is half serpent. Her loveliness, on the contrary, is implied throughout the story. See also *Diodorus Siculus*, Lib. xx; and Blaydes' note on Aristophanes' *Frogs*, v. 293. Compare also Roscher, *Lexikon der griech. u. röm. Mythologie*, s. v. *Lamia*, Vol. II, cols. 1819 ff.

The classical Siren may have had some influence on our human headed monster—the wings, the virginial face, the persuasive voice, are certainly closely parallel.